

Flashy rock group

Kiss only cheap thrills

By Bill Provick

For Kiss, America's new champions of winter-themed rock, the medium — assured visual effects — is in good shape, but the message — hot and heavy rock — needs a lot more work.

The members of Kiss — four ambitious rock performers dressed in black leather with silver trim, exceptionally high boots and painted faces — have worked exceptionally hard to bring their band to international fame (or infamy, depending on your tolerance threshold when it comes to deliberate debauchery).

Thursday night they brought their programmed pyrotechnics to the Civic Centre to dazzle a young, arduous crowd of about 4,000, but had some difficulty in living up to the immense spectacular image they have formed for themselves.

Kiss' stream-of-consciousness and effort over talent and thus their records have been limited only on a rebellious, visceral level, failing completely to rise up as good music without the implied excitement of a live performance.

With showmanship rather than musical worth, the group's main forte, one expects to be able to do what the music is, and more vehicle for the band's theatrics. But as discussed

Thursday night, when the relatively brief effects start coming every third or fourth song, one has little choice but to divert attention to the music and the band's disappointment, for musically Kiss isn't any better in stage than they are in record.

And even if one consents to treat the special effects quite highly — and they certainly were impressive — the really spectacular remains unconvincingly less effective than intended without a strong musical base from which to spring.

If there is no real musical excitement on stage, the special effects remain an almost embarrassing case of overkill.

Basically, Kiss has members between Bachman-Turner Overdrive (BTO) and the old Alice Cooper band, lacking the catchiness of BTO's music and the class of Alice Cooper's original rock.

Cooper and his band succeeded because they had some already strong popular songs to simplify through their theatrics.

Kiss is improving, especially now that they have adopted Cooper's record producer Bob Ezrin, but the majority of the band's established repertoire is far from memorable.

If Kiss is to capture Cooper's crown — or is that Alice's star? — it will be by default, Cooper



Kiss musician

having run off to Las Vegas' ready and when properly belated by the band's lead singer, the audience was happy to see more exciting than the Kiss concert. Thursday night, as was BTO's relatively good first performance here last summer.

With considerably less props, Cooper was more than able to do what he was still doing as a warm-up act for other bands.

Kiss plays a simple, high-pitched brand of hard rock but cannot all of it, and thus the band's volume — loud — and speed — full out. There are few peaks and valleys in the music, and the crowd's reaction is more for its initial impact.

Kiss music. That one song sounds much like any other, and in some ways it is, and in some ways it is not. The music is surprisingly being as surprising as the band's theatrics, but some of the band's music is so visually striking that it is almost embarrassing.

The audience appeared determined to forget Kiss' musical shortcomings, but between bursts of special effects, many appeared to be having second thoughts. Still, the stage already planned in the listener's mind was not purely destroyed by Thursday

band members are like comic book characters with black balloons.

One of the band's more infamous stunts involves guitarist Gene Simmons slowly exuding theatrical blood from his painted mouth, with his scarlet tongue sticking about his white face like some obscure, vaguely entwined around the microphone stand.

It's a good thing Kiss showed out their special effects evenly throughout the show of the kids would have been ready to go home 15 minutes after the band started.

As it was, the band's set ended — with appropriate flash and flare — just 60 minutes after it began. The crowd seemed far more into the band's theatrics and excitement didn't quite ring true and didn't match the genuine excitement that has followed other concerts.

In contrast to the larger-than-life yet smaller-than-expected performance by Kiss, the warm-up act, Hammerhead, from Vancouver, arrived on stage without an image, reputation or following. In fact Hammerhead is virtually unknown in this area, but they may well change.

Though this surprisingly connected audience, it turned in an impressive 45 minutes of hard and tight rock and roll. Musically, though, nothing for the recognition, they were considerably better than Kiss and had Hammerhead arrived with half the exposure, image and degree of familiarity Kiss had, they could easily have landed the feature performers right off the stage.

Even when reviving mirrored guitars turned out to be a waste of time, the band's use of light, rig and stage, it was several minutes before the band actually got going, during the band's first song.

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